

*Sleeping with Strangers*

By Jack Karp

10-page sample

HAROLD

Someone can't take a joke.

CANDY

And someone doesn't listen. I've told you a hundred times if you make me lose my voice, we can't –

HAROLD

Uh-uh-uh. You already said I picked you up in a bar. You can't have told me anything a hundred times.

CANDY

Oh, we were just pretending you picked me up in a bar to spice things up.

HAROLD

Oooh, yeah, yeah, I like it. I swept you off your feet at the strip club and...

CANDY

... and we fell head over heels for each other...

HAROLD

... and I just couldn't bear the thought of you taking your clothes off every night for all those sweaty, disgusting men...

CANDY

... so you jumped up on stage and grabbed me right from under the nose of my violent, mob-connected club boss and whisked me away on a transoceanic voyage to the safety of your remote Gothic –

HAROLD

Two-bedroom condo in the suburbs, where we got married and lived happily ever after.

CANDY

Until I grew so bored that I needed to pretend you were a stranger just to make things even remotely sufferable.

HAROLD

Hey! I am not boring.

CANDY

Really? Okay, then, Mr. Condo-in-the-Suburbs, if you were lying about being a poet, what are you?

HAROLD

The truth?

CANDY

No, I want you to make something up.

HAROLD

All right, I'm... a... I'm a... salesman.

CANDY

Pretty generous use of the word, isn't it? Drug dealers don't usually refer to themselves as salesmen.

(HAROLD is now dressed as a drug dealer – expensive but loud suit with his shirtfront unbuttoned, sunglasses, gold chain, maybe even a bag of white powder.)

HAROLD

You know, I've asked you not to call me a drug dealer just because I sell pharmaceuticals for Pfizer.

(HAROLD is now in a conservative suit and tie, with a briefcase.)

CANDY

Ugh, really?

HAROLD

What's wrong with being a salesman?

CANDY

IT'S BORING!

HAROLD

Funny how you don't think it's boring when you're out spending my commissions on all your fancy dresses and jewelry...

(CANDY is suddenly wearing a fancy dress and jewelry.)

... and this nice big house...

(An expensive-looking chandelier and fireplace appear.)

... with our flat-screen plasma TV...

(Which suddenly appears.)

HAROLD (cont'd.)

... and the brand-new Mercedes in the driveway.

(There is the sound of an electronic car alarm system from off.)

CANDY

Hmmm... I will admit, this house is nice. Too bad we could only afford it because it's in such a horrible neighborhood where we have to dodge gangs and drive-bys every night.

(There is gunfire and bullet holes appear in the TV. HAROLD ducks.)

HAROLD

But it did allow us to get a great deal on this place before the neighborhood got so gentrified. Did you see they just put in a Starbucks up the block?

(A Starbucks cup appears in HAROLD'S hand. He drinks from it.)

See? Being a salesman, not so bad.

CANDY

No, I guess not. At least until you got fired because my old boss from the strip club kept showing up at your office threatening to kill you for stealing me away from him.

(There's a loud, violent banging, as if someone is pounding on a door, and an angry male voice from off.)

VOICE

LET ME THE FUCK IN!

HAROLD

Shit!

VOICE

I'M GONNA KILL YOU, I SWEAR!

CANDY

Better answer it. He sounds impatient.

(HAROLD tries to hide behind the bed, or by covering himself with CANDY'S discarded clothes. The knocking continues.)

What are you doing?

HAROLD

What does it look like I'm doing?

VOICE

I'M GONNA TEAR YOUR HEAD OFF AND TAKE A SHIT DOWN YOUR THROAT!

CANDY

You can't cower forever.

HAROLD

You have any better ideas?

CANDY

Do I have to do everything around here?

HAROLD

Okay, okay... Ummm... it's, uh, lucky for me I was able to throw him off my trail by running away.

(The banging stops. HAROLD is visibly relieved.)

CANDY

With the circus!

(HAROLD is suddenly wearing a leotard and tights. A trapeze swing is lowered from the ceiling. HAROLD looks at it.)

HAROLD

Not funny.

CANDY

What boy hasn't fantasized about running off with the circus?

(HAROLD sighs and tries to clumsily climb onto the trapeze. He makes several failed attempts before finally falling to the floor, hard.)

HAROLD

Ah!

CANDY

You're a worse trapeze artist than you are a poet.

HAROLD

Good thing I won all that money in my worker's comp lawsuit against Ringling and I was able to quit the circus and go back to school to finish my degree in accounting.

(HAROLD is now wearing a green eye shade.)

CANDY

Damnit, why do you always have to do that?

HAROLD

Do what?

CANDY

Insist on painting everything with the same shit-brown brush. Wouldn't you rather be an art thief seducing me to get into the museum where I work? Or a spy on his way to Afghanistan and you want one last night with a beautiful woman?

HAROLD

Actually, no. That sounds like an awful lot of work.

CANDY

Why can't you have even one iota of imagination?

HAROLD

And why do you have to make everything so exhausting? Today a rapist attacking an innocent co-ed, yesterday an injured Hollywood stuntman being tended by a young production assistant. Why does everything you come up with involve me risking life and limb?

CANDY

Because it's sexy. Disaster is delicious, tragedy is titillating, danger reminds you that you're alive.

HAROLD

Last week you made me a semen collector at a crocodile breeding center.

CANDY

Oh, and what about you? You're always making me some kind of porn star or dominatrix or virginal-but-curious Catholic schoolgirl who's run away from home in search of her first sexual experience.

HAROLD

That was one of my favorites.

CANDY

Exactly. It's supposed to be fun. You get to be whoever you want.

HAROLD

No, I get to be whoever *you* want.

CANDY

And you get to make me whoever *you* want. You want an inhumanly flexible Russian gymnast? You can make me that. You want a world-famous courtesan who knows all the most closely guarded secrets about how to bring a man to unprecedented heights of pleasure, you can make me that.

HAROLD

What if I want a loving wife who spends all day counting down the minutes until I come home from the office when she greets me at the door with nothing but a silk nightie and a nice cold martini?

(CANDY is in a silk nightie and is holding a martini. HAROLD takes it.)

Thanks. That was thoughtful.

(He sips.)

CANDY

You have been so afraid of taking any kind of risk ever since you came back from the war.

(HAROLD is suddenly in a military uniform.)

HAROLD

The war?

CANDY

Why do you think you have such an aversion to guns?

HAROLD

You always do have to make all the parts of the story fit together, don't you?

CANDY

What can I say? I don't like loose ends. It's my own fault, I suppose. My mother warned me to not marry a vet.

HAROLD

You're right, I haven't been myself lately. The animals I was caring for over there are so sick, it's hard for me to think about anything else.

(HAROLD is now in a white doctor's coat with a stethoscope.)

CANDY

Oh, that's right. I forgot how much you love animals. Good thing they let you have one of those big mean dogs at your new job as a cop –

– er wire manufacturer.

HAROLD

Race car d –

CANDY

– detailer.

HAROLD

Test pilot –

CANDY

– episode writer for NBC.

HAROLD

Fire –

CANDY

– extinguisher inspector.

HAROLD

Space station –

CANDY

– model builder for the science museum!

HAROLD

I can keep this up all night, you know.

CANDY

HAROLD  
No, you can't, because it's your turn to pick up little Timmy from school.

(A bunch of children's toys – balls, plastic trucks, coloring books – appear all over the floor.)

CANDY  
No, no, no, you cannot do that!

(HAROLD picks up one of the toys.)

HAROLD  
Looks like I already did.

CANDY

We had a deal, no kids. You know I wanted excitement, travel, fun. That's why we always use birth control.

HAROLD

Yeah, turns out the lost-and-found box at the YMCA isn't such a great place to get condoms. Better get a move on. Timmy's school lets out in ten minutes.

CANDY

I wish you would stop being so overprotective. Tim is perfectly capable of driving himself home from high school in the Mercedes.

(The toys on the floor turn to teenager's things – sports equipment, CDs, etc. The toy in HAROLD'S hand turns into a porn magazine.)

I thought you were going to talk to him about these.

(She takes the magazine away from him.)

Somebody needs to learn the women in these magazines are real people, not just pretty faces for him to project his fantasies onto.

HAROLD

Oh, don't be upset. I know he wasn't planned, but he is the best thing that ever happened to us.

CANDY

We had an agreement.

HAROLD

I never agreed to that. That's what you wanted. I always said I wanted kids.

CANDY

Yes, but you're always saying things you don't really mean because of your Tourette's.

HAROLD

Hey! That's not fai-uck, shit, twat!

(He covers his mouth.)

CANDY

You've been like that ever since you got back from the war.

HAROLD

You-terus are playing dirty – panties!

CANDY

The doctors say it's a psychological response to not being allowed to speak out against all the atrocities you saw over there.

HAROLD

You can't do – doo! Cocka! – that.

CANDY

(Mocking.)  
Looks like I already did.

HAROLD

Come on – my face! Make it go–at testicles! – away.

CANDY

Get rid of the kid.

HAROLD

I can't – cock, cunt!

CANDY

Do it or I will.

HAROLD

You know the rules – two in the pink, one in the stink!

CANDY

I don't care. Think of something. Be creative.

HAROLD

I will not – take it up the ass!

CANDY

Well, that's a shame. I was hoping I wouldn't have to put you in that institution.

(HAROLD is now wearing a straight jacket.)

It's a horrible place, but what kind of mother would I be if I let you carry on like this with Tim around?

HAROLD

It is a horrible place – your vagina! – but at least I have a lot of time to read in here. I've been through the entire hospital library and look – up your skirt! – what I found.

(A thick book appears on the stool. He reads the cover aloud.)

HAROLD (cont'd.)

“Power Dynamics in Sex Clubs” by Dr. Irwin C. Hickenpoop.

(He opens the book with his mouth and reads.)

“In sex clubs – Tiger Woods! – despite conventional theories of female exploitation, women hold all the power – vibrator! – being in possession of and having control over what it is the men so desperately want – to go to sleep after sex! – i.e., the women’s bodies, and they are held up on a sort of modern pedestal – butt plug – while the men literally beg at their feet just to be allowed to –”

(CANDY grabs the book away from him and looks at it.)

Look at that, someone published the same work right before you were – lubed up! – to. Oh, well, that’s six years down the toilet – runny diarrhea!

CANDY

Well, maybe if you had spent less time reading and more time in the therapy you were supposed to be doing, they wouldn’t have had to resort to electroshock treatment.

(HAROLD now has a plastic mouth guard in his mouth and electrodes on each of his temples. There is the sound of an electric shock and he convulses.)

Get rid of the kid.

(HAROLD shakes his head no.)

What a shame it’s working so poorly. But the doctors insist if they keep doing it, it will cure you eventually.

(Another shock. He convulses.)

Are you going to fix this?

(He shakes his head no.)

Sometimes people have shock therapy for years before it works.

(Another shock. He convulses.)

Change your mind yet?

(Brief pause. He nods.)

See, I told you it would work.